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Stretching communities of value downward, sideways, and forward

Jon E Fox

2,545 words

Introduction

Us and Them? charts the changing boundaries and shifting contents of Britain's community of value. Much has happened since its publication in 2013 to redefine this community of value: the Scottish Referendum of 2014 which attempted to contract the territorial and national boundaries of the community; the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 that featured not as a crisis (firstly) for those fleeing war, but for us and our community of value; and then Brexit in 2016, which tightened that community around a revitalised national core.

None of these developments undermine Anderson's analysis; to the contrary, they underscore how prescient that analysis is. It's the shapeshifting quality of the community of value, transforming its content, adapting its boundaries, and recalibrating its valences, that explains these contortions in response to changing circumstances. *Us and Them?* is theoretically rich, historically deep, empirically erudite, and analytically sophisticated. The simplicity and elegance of its underlying us/them binary easily accommodates the changing permutations of the community over time and across different context. My modest aim here is not to challenge this framework but to think instead about how it might be extended further: downward (epistemologically, to the everyday agents of communities of value); sideways (laterally, to different international contexts), and forward (prophetically, into the future). Throughout, I have a particular interest in the racialised inflections of communities of value.

1. Downward

Anderson concerns herself for the most part with how communities of value are defined 'from above'. It's the vagrancy laws and the immigration policies, the political rhetoric and the naturalisation procedures, where the boundaries and contents of communities of value are produced and reproduced. But this community of value is of course also dependent upon its quotidian ratification by the ordinary people in whose name it speaks. It doesn't always get that popular endorsement, though: whether through active subversion or simple indifference, the actions (and inactions) of ordinary people can sometimes undermine more elaborate plans to construct the state's preferred community of value (de Certeau 1984: xii-xiv, 95-98). It's this perspective – of ordinary people ensconced in the banality of their everyday lives – that is not fully developed in Anderson's analysis. But these foot soldiers of the community of value are in their own way producing and reproducing – and sometimes undermining and subverting – communities of value in their everyday lives.

This can be seen in the case of East European migration to the UK following EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Anderson is interested in the policy framework for this intra-European mobility, and its (sometimes) racialised effects. But what of the people thus racialised? Some East Europeans were beneficiaries of immigration policies that privileged (white) Europeans over other (non-white) non-Europeans. Others – Romanians and Bulgarians, for instance, but especially the Roma – didn't fare so well, and in some ways became the racialised face of popular anxiety over immigration (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2012).

'Raceless' politics thus did produce 'raceful' effects, as Anderson contends, but not evenly. These effects are further complicated when examined from the perspective of ordinary people. Against the backdrop of grandiose policy frameworks and bombastic political rhetoric is the banality and minutiae of everyday life, where communities of value take shape in accordance with the quotidian

rhythms of ordinary people. East Europeans coming to the UK not only discovered the racialised boundaries of their new community of value but also how they could invoke their whiteness to position themselves within its boundaries – a positioning not always endorsed by the community's current tenants, a dominant white and British majority. Whiteness, however, is not a condition, but a claim, and so its boundaries shift when those claims are ratified and upheld – or questioned and challenged – in the varied contexts of everyday life (see Garner 2006: 264-65; Twine and Gallagher 2008: 12).

In the research my colleagues and I did on Hungarians and Romanians in Bristol (Fox 2013; Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2015), we witnessed how these East Europeans negotiated and manipulated the boundaries of this community value in different ways. For some, racism was an effective strategy for shoring up their own white credentials (Fox 2013). Rather than explicitly claiming that they were white, they hastened instead to darken others, thus placing themselves on the side of Britain's other darkeners, the dominant (and therefore white) majority. At the same time they denied that they themselves were victims of racism or discrimination – something in their eyes that was reserved for more visible minorities (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2015). Being perpetrators, and not victims of racism, helped leapfrog East Europeans onto the right side of the boundaries of a racialised community of value.

These boundaries of the community are thus flexible, and much of that flexing is being done by ordinary people. Taking inspiration from Barth (1969: 15), communities of value should be understood not only in terms the racialised and other 'stuff' they contain, but also according to the racialising (and other) practices that produce and maintain those boundaries in the first place. Refocussing the analytical lens on sites of everyday interaction allows us to understand how ordinary people can squeeze through and also patch up porous boundaries, how they can defend and also fortify hardened boundaries, and how they can develop other strategies for negotiating, avoiding, and penetrating boundaries.

Communities of value are thus not only the product of elite machinations, institutional practices, or the symbolic violence of the state; they are simultaneously played out in the quotidian encounters of ordinary people in their everyday lives. This is a kind of Weberian social closure, whereby available traits are invoked (whiteness in the East European case) to uphold and defend – or claim and usurp – membership in a group (Weber 1978 [1921], 388; see also 342-343). Such claims cannot be made willy-nilly; they require some sort of wider currency if they're going to be endorsed. But neither should we discount the currency they require in the contexts of everyday life (see Anderson 2013: 36-37 on this point).

2. Sideways

The second way Anderson's analytical framework might be extended is sideways, or laterally, to other international contexts. *Us and Them?* traces the history of modern immigration policy in the UK to reveal how 'raceless' policies (policies not explicitly invoking 'race' as a criterion of immigration control) consistently produce 'raceful' effects (the exclusion and/or control of certain racialised categories of immigrants). Thus we are shown how requirements of literacy, property ownership, and knowledge of a European language were used to exclude non-Europeans from India in the 19th century, and how the descendants of parents or grandparents born in the UK (the so-called 'patrials' – again, white people) were given preference in the 1971 Immigration Act. The examples don't stop there: the decision to open the doors to workers from the EU's newest member states in 2004 was motivated by economic considerations (filling a gap in the low-end sector of the economy) but had the effect of privileging white European workers over non-white, non-European workers (Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2012). This approach did not explicitly invoke racial categories because it didn't have to: by favouring EU nationals, it implicitly favoured white,

European migrants (Favell 2008, p. 704). More recently, income restrictions on immigrants wishing to settle in the UK (combined with the increasingly high costs of naturalisation) make it more difficult for immigrants of lesser economic means to settle in the UK, which in practice leads to the exclusion of immigrants from less economically developed (but more somatically colourful) parts of the world.

Anderson is interested in how these 'raceless' policies produce 'raceful' effects. But if we extend our analysis laterally to other international contexts we can find less racially bashful versions of immigration policy. In the settler countries of Canada, Australia, and the United States, for instance, different versions of 'white-only' only immigration policies explicitly excluded Chinese and other immigrants from Asia well into the 20th century (Joppke 2005). If the framers of British immigration policy wished to mask their racist intentions behind other, more socially acceptable categories of exclusion, their counterparts in the Americas appeared less bothered by the consequences that racialised exclusion might have for their otherwise liberal communities of value (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014).

Modifying Anderson's framework, these examples show how 'raceful' policies (that explicitly excluded on racial grounds) can also produce 'raceful' effects. But not all states want to exclude on racial grounds; some want to include on those grounds. We can also see, then, how 'raceful' policies that explicitly *include* on racial grounds can produce 'raceful' effects as well. Germany and Israel, for example, have privileged putatively shared ethnicity as a 'right of return' for would-be co-ethnic migrants 'returning' from the diaspora (Joppke 2005). Spain and Italy favour immigrants of Hispanic and Italian extraction from South America; Japan has turned to 'racially' Japanese immigrants from South America to address their work shortages; and Russia offers special entitlements for Russians from the 'near abroad' (the successor states of the former Soviet Union) to 'return' to Russia (see Tsuda 2009; Skrentny *et al.* 2007).

If both 'raceless' and 'raceful' policies can produce 'raceful' effects, can 'raceful' policies also produce 'raceless' effects? Probably not, if we understand those effects in terms of the racialised exclusion (or inclusion) of the immigrants targeted by such policies. But if we consider some of the broader societal impacts of these policies, it is at least theoretically possible that they could lead to the declining currency of 'race' in defining communities of value. I'm thinking here of recent work on conviviality (Gilroy 2004). One possible effect of the super-diversity resulting from decades of immigration (Vertovec 2007) is that it has normalised racialised difference in ways that have made some people in some contexts indifferent to difference. This indifference does not necessarily undermine a more racialised (and dominant) versions community of value, but it does offer their inhabitants a parallel strategy of value-making not strictly dictated by racialised logics. For these people, the shock of the new has long since worn off, and the racialised boundaries that previously defined the community of value become more porous, less salient, less conspicuous. Or maybe not.

Shifting our gaze to different international contexts reveals greater variation in the relationship between 'raceless' and 'raceful' policies and their 'raceful' and possibly 'raceless' effects. In all cases, both the immigration policies that give expression to communities of value also potentially transform those communities through their intended and unintended effects, often in racialised registers.

3. Forward

What's the future for the community of value? This is where I began: *Us and Them?* has already revealed its prophetic powers. The community of value soldiers on, shaping – and being shaped by – ever-changing circumstances, from above and below. *Us and Them?* didn't predict the Scottish Referendum, the 'refugee crisis', or Brexit, but it did equip its readers with an analytical language for understanding how the community of value adapts itself in accordance with a changing world. This

indeed is the key strength of the book, its ability not only to understand the past, but also to see into the future.

But that future also reveals some of the limits of the community of value. The election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States presents us with an interesting, and ongoing, test case for liberally informed communities of value. In one sense, Trump's election represents just another redrawing of the boundaries of community value, this time around a shrinking core of white men. Muslims aren't included because they are terrorists-in-waiting; Mexicans don't belong because they are rapists and criminals; and Black lives, well, they simply don't matter. The categories of racialised and gendered 'others' are expanding rapidly outside the boundaries of this white male core.

These boundaries will shift, but what about the foundational values that anchor the community of value in the first place? For Anderson (2013: 3), 'The Good Citizen' who embodies that community of value is defined as the 'the liberal sovereign self: rational, self-owning, and independent, with a moral compass that enables him to consider the interests of others.' If we take these liberal values as foundational, then it's difficult to see how Donald Trump's America can still be defined as a community of value. Trump's America effectively turns the community of value inside-out, placing the liberal values of that community that supposedly define it *outside* of its racially contracting boundaries, offering its moral compass to those on the outside, but not those on the inside. The boundaries of the community of value can change, but when its foundational values are abandoned, the community of value loses its *raison d'être*.

Anderson does not discuss illiberal or authoritarian states in her book, but they raise interesting questions about the centrality of liberalism to communities of value. Illiberal states define their communities, sometimes using similar (racialised and gendered) criteria. But are these communities of value? Or valueless communities?

Conclusion

Us and Them? does not reveal its blemishes easily. It's a powerful book that incisively shows how the Good Citizen constructs her community of value around changing notions of us and them. I wholeheartedly endorse this framework for analysis. My only intervention here has been to try to extend that framework downward to the ordinary agents of community-building, sideways to varied international contexts, and forward into the future limits of the community of value.

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